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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine if teachers of disadvantaged children encountered instructional problems in reading that teachers of students who are not disadvantaged did not. A questionnaire was distributed to 12 grades-one-through-four teachers in a school serving the disadvantaged and 12 teachers in a school in which students were not considered to be disadvantaged. Results showed that teachers of disadvantaged children encountered a greater number of problems than their colleagues who did not teach the disadvantaged and that these problems were manifested to a significantly higher degree. The problems considered of greatest importance by the teachers of the disadvantaged are providing for individual differences, lack of teacher preparation (no reading methods courses in college), poor language development in students, large reading readiness, and attendance and mobility of students. (A copy of the questionnaire is appended.) (FL)

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Instructional Problems in Reading as Seen by Teachers of Disadvantaged vs Non-Disadvantaged Children

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the Master of Arts Degree in Reading Specialization
at Kean College of New Jersey

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Gladys J. Lovett
April 1983

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether teachers of disadvantaged children and teachers of non-disadvantaged children were confronted with the same instructional problems in reading and to what degree these problems were experienced.

A questionnaire was distributed to twelve primary grade teachers in a disadvantaged school and twelve primary grade teachers in a non-disadvantaged school.

The results indicated that teachers of disadvantaged children were confronted with a greater number of problems and these problems were manifested to a significantly higher degree than for the teachers of non-disadvantaged children.

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Introduction

Teachers involved in teaching children who are disadvantaged encounter problems that are not evinced by teachers instructing children who are not disadvantaged. Much has been written about the disadvantaged child relevant to his shortcomings and particular needs; but there is an obvious void in research studies concerning the problems faced by teachers of disadvantaged children.

The plight of the culturally deprived youngster has been described by Deutch (1960)

> "Not only do they fall behind in the basic skills, such as reading and arithmetic, but they also respond minimally to the broader aspect of function of the school: the instilling of a respect for knowledge, the fostering of the development of the cognitive skills necessary for acquiring knowledge and the general function of equipping a child to live as a responsible citizen."

Johnson (1970) pointed out that disadvantaged children generally lack the prerequisites to become good readers in the present school curriculum. He states that regardless of the method used, many of them will fail to become good readers because they are not ready. The curriculum for beginning instruction assumes that children are equipped with middle-class orientation, and a middle-class background of experiences. Since the culturally deprived child has neither, the standard curriculum operates against him from the first day of school.

Strom (1966) and Crow (1966) concur that culturally deprived children tend to enter school at a considerable disadvantage when compared with their age-mates from middle and upper classes. They are so poorly prepared in attitudes and background that they are ill-equipped to meet school demands; failure is inevitable from the start.

Feitelson (1968) reports that most studies indicate that problems faced by various cultural subgroups in different parts of the world are synonymous to the problems faced by disadvantaged children in the United States. (1) Lack of adequate motor skills: the early home environment of the culturally disadvantaged child typically lacks certain types of manipulative play and work materials found in middle class homes that presumably develop deftness and coordination in the use of their hands. (2) Cognitive unpreparedness: the various form boards and puzzles found among the toys of middle class children seem to develop a series of skills essential to the successful acquisition of reading. (3) Language deficiency: Deutsch (1964) points out that the disadvantaged child has a much poorer command of his mother tongue. According to Bernstein (1964) the child in the middle and upper-class home is typically exposed to an "elaborate" language code, whereas the child in the culturally disadvantaged home has much less language experience and it is of a different kind. (4) Affective difficulties: the attention span of culturally disadvantaged students tends to be short and their ability to concentrate poor. A second obstacle is the inability of many disadvantaged pupils to defer gratification. Other aspects of pupil attitude that are descriptive of culturally disadvantaged children are lack of self-confidence and inability to tolerate failure. (5) Unavailability of help during the learning period: in this respect the student from the disadvantaged home is at a grave disadvantage.

According to Riesman (1962) and Johnson (1970) the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their middle-class peers at the time of entering school increasingly widens as both groups progress.

Their learning style, lack of literacy as a tradition, the inappropriateness of most reading materials and their anti-intellectualism are negative factors that contribute to poor achievement in reading.

Hypothesis

Many teachers are involved in teaching the disadvantaged child, yet the problems encountered by these teachers are seldom identified. It was hypothesized that instructional problems do exist for teachers of disadvantaged children that do not exist for teachers of children who are non-disadvantaged.

Definitions

Culturally Deprived - Riessman (1962) "refers to members of lower socioeconomic groups who have had limited access to education."

Disadvantaged - The term is used interchangeably with culturally deprived.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that instructional problems do exist when teaching disadvantaged children. It is further assumed that the questionnaire will reveal the problem areas and that knowledge of these areas might stimulate change or improvement. The study will be carried out in an elementary school in Jersey City and an elementary school in Hillside.

Description of Procedures Used

The instrument used in this investigation was of the questionnaire type, allowing respondents to indicate whether each problem listed

was major, minor or not a problem to them in their individual teaching situations.

The questionnaires were administered to twelve teachers in grades one through four in a disadvantaged area of Jersey City, New Jersey and twelve teachers in grades one through four in a non-disadvantaged area of Hillside, New Jersey.

The researcher met with the principal of the disadvantaged school briefly outlining the purpose of the study. After reviewing the questionnaire, a response in the affirmative was secured. A personal phone call was made to the principal of the non-disadvantaged school and as suggested, a formal letter and a sample of the questionnaire was sent to the Superintendent of the Hillside Public Schools outlining the nature of the project and a request that his office contact the principal of the targeted school informing him that materials would be forthcoming with his consent.

The materials were then hand-delivered to the principal. Prior to distribution, a personal note from the principal was attached to each questionnaire stating his approval and a time for the materials to be returned to his office.

The response was prompt from both schools. The final number of completed questionnaires was twenty-four, or one-hundred per cent of the number which had been distributed. Responses were then tabulated so that the questions posed at the outset of the study could be answered.

Results

A study of the responses as shown in Table I makes evident the problems encountered by teachers of disadvantaged children. Of the four-

Table I

Instructional Problems in Reading as Seen by Teachers of Disadvantaged Children

Problems	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Not A Problem
1. Providing for individual differences (through grouping and making provisions for children with reading problems and the gifted)	53%	40%	7%
2. Time (lack of teaching time)	47%	40%	13%
3. Teacher preparation and Adequacy in Reading Instruction. (Lack of reading method courses in College)	60%	13%	27%
4. Materials (inadequate workbooks, readers, teachers guidebooks, library facilities, and audio-visual materials)	13%	40%	47%
5. Language Development (poor background)	73%	27%	
6. Class Size	53%	40%	7%
7. Parental Attitudes	60%	40%	.
8. Development of Basic Skills	67%	20%	13%
9. Reading Readiness (Primarily initial stages of reading instruction)	67%	27%	7%
10. Identification and Evaluation of reading needs (lack of)	33%	40%	27%
11. Adequate reading records (lack of)		47%	53%
12. Attendance and Mobility of Students	80%	20%	
13. Urban-oriented materials (lack of)	27%	60%	13%
14. Special Personnel (lack of remedial reading teachers)	40%	27%	33%

teen problems listed on the questionnaire, teachers viewed eight in the major problem category to be above the 50 per cent level.

It is important to note that 80 per cent of the teachers considered attendance and mobility a major problem. Twenty per cent considered this to be a minor problem. Poor language development accounted for difficulty for 73 per cent of the teachers while 27 per cent viewed this as a minor problem.

It is apparent that the majority of teachers consider reading readiness as critical in teaching reading to disadvantaged children since 67 per cent regarded it as a major problem, 27 per cent thought it to be a minor problem and only 7 per cent did not view this as a problem. Development of basic skills also registered 67 per cent in the major problem category. In the minor problem and not a problem columns, this question registered 20 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Parental attitudes accounted for difficulty according to 60 per cent of the responses and it is obvious that no teacher considered this not to be a problem. One respondent recorded that parents projected a non-caring attitude. Teacher preparation and adequacy of reading instruction was considered a major problem by 60 per cent of the teachers. Three teachers commented that some type of course should be incorporated into the undergraduate reading program specifically related to teaching disadvantaged children. Thirteen percent considered this a minor problem and 27 per cent responded that this was not a problem.

Two other questions related to providing for individual differences and class size was thought to be a major problem by 53 per cent of the teachers. Forty per cent felt these were minor problems and 7 per

cent did not deem them as problems. The lack of teaching time presented a major problem for 47 per cent of the teachers. One teacher was critical of the number of unwarranted interruptions which disrupted classroom activities. Forty per cent considered this a minor problem while 13 per cent did not view this as a problematic area.

Responding to the question regarding lack of remedial reading teachers, 40 per cent recorded it as a major problem, 27 per cent as a minor problem and 33 per cent indicated this was not a problem. In the area of identification and evaluation of reading needs, the majority of teachers responded in the minor problem column, accounting for 40 per cent of the sample. Thirty-three per cent thought this to be a major problem as opposed to 27 per cent indicating this was not a problem as related to their individual situations. Urban oriented material presented a minor problem for 60 per cent of the respondents. It is apparent that teachers do not consider materials (inadequate workbooks, readers, library facilities, etc.) as major problem in their particular school. Forty-seven per cent responded major as opposed to 13 per cent who considered this to be minor. However, while the majority did not consider this problem major, one teacher expressed concern over the lack of time to use the abundance of available material to the best advantage of her/his students. Although one teacher stated that teachers were required to keep too many records, adequate reading records was not viewed as a major problem since 53 per cent indicated this was not a problem.

Table II analyzes the responses in percentage form given by teachers in the non-disadvantaged school. Of the fourteen problems listed on the questionnaire five show a percentage of the teachers

Table II

Instructional Problems in Reading as Seen by Teachers of Non-Disadvantaged Children

Problems	Major Problem	Minor Problem	Not A Problem
1. Providing for individual differences (through grouping and making provisions for children with reading problems and the gifted)		44%	56%
2. Time (lack of teaching time)	11%	22%	67%
3. Teacher preparation and Adequacy in Reading Instruction. (Lack of reading method courses in College)		22%	78%
4. Materials (inadequate workbooks, readers, teachers guidebooks, library facilities, and audio-visual materials)	11%		89%
5. Language Development (poor background)	11%	78%	11%
6. Class Size	11%	56%	33%
7. Parental Attitudes	11%	33%	56%
8. Development of Basic Skills		78%	22%
9. Reading Readiness (Primarily initial stages of reading instruction)		67%	33%
10. Identification and Evaluation of reading needs (lack of)		11%	89%
11. Adequate reading records (lack of)		11%	89%
12. Attendance and Mobility of Students		33%	67%
13. Urban-oriented materials (lack of)		44%	56%
14. Special Personnel (lack of remedial reading teachers)		11%	89%

responding in the major problem category. Each of these five questions received 11 per cent of the responses. The problems are as follows: lack of teaching time, inadequate materials, language development, class size and parental attitudes.

Grouping together the problems considered to be minor and those thought to be non-existent, it is apparent that the majority of teachers decided that language development was an area not to be ignored as 78 per cent responded minor as opposed to 11 per cent indicating that it was not a problem. Reading readiness was a minor problem to 67 per cent of the respondents while 33 per cent felt it to be non-existent. Seventy-eight per cent regarded development of basic skills as a minor problem while 22 per cent said it was not a problem. The teacher sample indicated that class size was an area of concern as 56 per cent thought it to be a minor problem as opposed to 33 per cent who did not view this as a problem.

Data in this table show that teachers consider providing for individual differences and lack of urban oriented material to be a minor problem as 44 per cent placed it in that category. The remaining 56 per cent did not see it as a problem. Responding to the question pertaining to attendance and mobility of students, 33 per cent responded minor while 67 per cent said it was not a problem. Thirty-three per cent found parental attitudes to be a minor problem as opposed to 56 per cent responding not a problem.

Teacher preparation and adequacy in reading instruction was mentioned as a minor problem for 22 per cent while 78 per cent felt it was not a problem. One teacher commented that he/she was certified as a reading specialist. Twenty-two per cent decided that lack of teaching

time presented a minor problem in contrast to 67 per cent responding not a problem. In the areas of identification and evaluation of reading needs, adequate reading records and special personnel, each received 11 per cent considering them minor problems and the remaining 89 per cent indicating not a problem.

An overall view of Table III compares the major problems in reading and those considered not a problem for teachers of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children. It is apparent that teachers of disadvantaged children are confronted with instructional problems in reading the majority of which are deemed to be major. These same problems do not appear to be encountered with the same degree of intensity by the teachers in the non-disadvantaged school. There are decided differences in the responses of the two samples to questions two, four, five, six and seven where both samples indicate that the areas surveyed are major problems. The results suggest that, in these areas, the non-disadvantaged group experience problems to a minor extent.

The data also show that the teachers in the disadvantaged school experience with varying degrees of severity problems in nine additional areas of major importance but which are of little or no importance in the advantaged school.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study show that teachers of disadvantaged children do encounter instructional problems in the teaching of reading. The following problems were considered major concerns by the majority of teachers responding: providing for individual differences, teacher preparation, poor language development, class size, parental attitudes,

Table III

Comparison of the Major Problems and Those Considered Not a Problem Related to the Teaching of Reading to Disadvantaged and Non-Disadvantaged Children

Problems	Disadvantaged		Non-Disadvantaged	
	Major Problem	Not A Problem	Major Problem	Not A Problem
1. Providing for individual differences (through grouping and making provisions for children with reading problems and the gifted)	53%	7%	-	56%
2. Time (Lack of teaching time)	47%	13%	11%	67%
3. Teacher preparation and Adequacy in Reading Instruction. (Lack of reading method courses in College)	60%	27%	-	78%
4. Materials (inadequate workbooks, readers, teachers guidebooks, library facilities, and audio-visual materials)	13%	47%	11%	89%
5. Language Development (poor background)	73%	-	11%	11%
6. Class Size	53%	7%	11%	33%
7. Parental Attitudes	60%	-	11%	56%
8. Development of Basic Skills	67%	13%	-	22%
9. Reading Readiness (Primarily initial stages of reading instruction)	67%	7%	-	33%
10. Identification and Evaluation of reading needs (lack of)	33%	27%	-	89%
11. Adequate reading records (lack of)	-	53%	-	89%
12. Attendance and Mobility of Students	80%	-	-	67%
13. Urban-oriented materials (lack of)	27%	13%	-	56%
14. Special Personnel (lack of remedial reading teachers)	40%	33%	-	89%

development of basic skills, reading readiness and attendance and mobility of students.

The data in this study indicates the need for institutions of higher learning to incorporate into their curriculum courses which would provide prospective teachers with "first-hand" knowledge of the special problems of disadvantaged children and methods for "dealing" with these problems. Teachers responding in this study felt that class size was a major problem. However, research has substantiated that class size is not a significant factor affecting instruction except when the number of students is below fifteen. One way to enhance the development of basic skills and reading readiness would be to develop a well-organized and mandatory pre-school program to function cooperatively with the public schools.

Teachers of non-disadvantaged children indicated that these areas were of little or no significance in their personal teaching situations.

Disadvantaged Children and Language:

Related Literature

Many books and articles have been written and studies conducted concerning the disadvantaged child. The inferior educational attainment of disadvantaged children has been documented relatively well; but research concerning the problems faced by the teachers of these children remains sterile. Teachers of disadvantaged children daily encounter obstacles to classroom progress which are barriers to pupil achievement (Strom, 1965).

From the existent material Austin (1964), Conant (1961) and Deutsch (1967) found that teachers of disadvantaged children are greatly handicapped due to environmental problems, inadequate materials, unrelated content in reading books, insufficient teaching time and crowded classrooms.

Passow (1968) states that "schools that house the disadvantaged have been depicted in grim terms." The buildings are usually dilapidated, old and inadequate. Overly large classes in crowded unappealing rooms. The use of meager instructional material of poor quality or inappropriate nature by teachers from the middle-class or aspiring to it.

Johnson (1970), Deutsch (1968), Strom (1966) and Crow (1966) point out that curriculum for beginning instruction assumes that children are equipped with middle-class orientation, and a middle-class background of experiences. The culturally deprived child has neither. He comes to school poorly prepared to produce what the school requires of him, therefore, failure is inevitable from the start.

Johnson points out that culturally deprived children do not learn the values of education from their families, and they do not see the results of education operating in their homes. Because of the economic strain and lack of education, the parents of culturally deprived

children do not own books, subscribe to newspapers or magazines, or participate in activities that supplement education.

Spache (1975) reminds us that some minority and uneducated parents have negative attitudes toward school success and see little value for education in their own or in their children's lives. They tend to restrict the normal freedom of childhood experiences and thus, again handicap the child for school success. Parents who conceive of themselves as educational, marital, or vocational failures tend to transmit their feelings of frustration and helplessness to their children. Thus, many children grow up in a home that is both economically and educationally deprived.

Realizing the negative attitudes that many parents project to their children, Sexton (1962) states: "In a very real sense parents are responsible for the success or failure of their children in school. The child is a product of his family and class background just as his parents are of theirs. Very often the child is simply a reflection of parental attitudes, values, skills, and levels of understanding. Because of this, the schools must seek the help and cooperation of parents if they want to change the behavior of students."

An observation made by Deutsch (1967) concluded that the middle-class child is more likely to have been continuously prodded intellectually by his parents and rewarded for correct answers, whereas in the main, the lower-class child's parents have seldom subjected him to the pressures of a formal adult-child learning situation. Deutsch describes the plight of the culturally deprived child...

> "Not only do they fall behind in the basic skills, such as reading and arithmetic, but

> they also respond minimally to the broader aspect of function of the school: the instilling of a respect for knowledge, the fostering of the development of the cognitive skills necessary for acquiring knowledge and the general function of equipping a child to live as a responsible citizen."

Teaching reading to the disadvantaged, concur Feitelson (1968) and Passow (1968) is a problem that consists of many sub-problems, each needing time and attention to solve the whole. However, school curricula and learning techniques usually imply an assumption that the child has had prior experiences in the learning area.

Crosby (1967) states that "In the uninspiring and unstimulating climate existing in their homes, culturally deprived children enter school handicapped by an achievement lag." According to Riessman (1962) and Johnson (1970) the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their middle-class peers at the time of entering school increasingly widens as both groups progress. Their learning style, lack of literacy as a tradition, the inappropriateness of most reading materials and their anti-intellectualism are negative factors that contribute to poor achievement in reading.

A study conducted by Feitelson (1968) indicated that problems faced by various cultural sub-groups in different parts of the world are synonymous to the problems faced by disadvantaged children in the United States: (1) Lack of adequate motor skills, (2) Cognitive unpreparedness, (3) Affective difficulties, (4) Unavailability of help during the learning period, and (5) Language deficiency which is considered to be the most crippling. Observations made by Deutsch (1964), Bernstein (1964) and Johnson (1970) point out that the disadvantaged child has a much poorer command of his mother tongue. The child in the middle and upper-class

home is typically exposed to an "elaborate" language code, whereas the child in the culturally disadvantaged home has much less language experience and it is of a different kind. Their disadvantage in language continues as they get older, so that language skills are the major academic need of disadvantaged pupils at every grade level.

To further compound the learning situation, culturally deprived children tend to have a poor concept of self, short attention spans, the inability to delay gratification and a learning style which puts them at a disadvantage because it does not complement the orientation of the school curriculum. Reissman (1962) describes characteristics that are fairly typical of the deprived child's learning style: (1) Physical and visual rather than aural, (2) Content-centered rather than form-centered, (3) Externally oriented rather than introspective, (4) Problem-centered rather than abstract-centered, (5) Inductive rather than deductive, (6) Spatial rather than temporal, and (7) Slow, careful, patient, persevering rather than quick, clever, facile, flexible.

Sexton (1962) points out that culturally deprived children can learn to read when enough attention is given to them and their reading problems. A very significant problem has to do with the kind of material disadvantaged children are required to read in school. A number of studies have shown that these materials are based largely on the vocabulary, experiences and interest of upper-income groups. William H. Burton restates the problem:

> "Books used in the beginning reading practically never base content upon the experience known to the whole range of children using the books. The experience of the huge majority is in fact usually ignored. The very books designed to teach children to read actually cannot be read by some children.

Not a single series of readers includes the experience of lower-class children."

A study was conducted at the University of Kentucky based on the assumption that simple, readable, meaningful reading materials would considerably improve the reading skills and also the general standard of living of low-income children. Specially prepared reading materials dealing with problems of health and diet were introduced into two Kentucky schools. The project lasted for ten years. In the experimental group there was a pronounced improvement in fundamental learning skills, especially reading. It also showed that the materials on health and dietary habits had a positive effect on the attitudes of people and improved their standard of living.

Johnson (1970) and John Morlan and Robert Romonda (1968) remind us that the classroom teacher is the most important factor in the education of culturally disadvantaged children. Instructing the culturally deprived child can be a successful and rewarding endeavor. To be successful teachers must be equipped with special knowledge and skills. Teachers must know and understand the disadvantaged child--who he is, his social and psychological characteristics, and what he thinks and feels. Further, the teacher must know appropriate learning theory and be able to apply it. Materials and methods used for removing anxiety and improving the child's self-concept must be familiar to her/him. For the culturally deprived child, the teacher is usually the only meaningful and direct link with the dominant culture. The teacher is a model for standard English, behavioral patterns and the values of the dominant culture. The teacher must realize that these children can learn. The disadvantaged children who are achieving in spite of their

backgrounds should help to reinforce this.

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APPENDIX

Instructional Problems in Reading as Seen by Teachers of Disadvantaged Children vs Non-Disadvantaged Children

PROBLEMS	MAJOR PROBLEM	MINOR PROBLEM	NOT A PROBLEM
1. Providing for individual differences (through grouping and making provisions for children with reading problems and the gifted)			
2. Time (lack of teaching time)			
3. Teacher preparation and Adequacy in Reading Instruction. (Lack of reading method courses in College)			
4. Materials (inadequate workbooks, readers, teachers guides, library facilities, and audio-visual materials)			
5. Language Development (poor background)			
6. Class Size			
7. Parental Attitudes			
8. Development of Basic Skills			
9. Reading Readiness (Primarily initial stages of reading instruction)			
10. Identification and Evaluation of reading needs (lack of)			
11. Adequate reading records (lack of)			
12. Attendance and Mobility of Students			

PROBLEMS	MAJOR PROBLEM	MINOR PROBLEM	NOT A PROBLEM
13. Urban-oriented materials (lack of)			
14. Special Personnel (lack of remedial reading teachers)			